

## NEWS BULLETIN

### SCULPTOR PROFILE NINA AKAMU

Nina Akamu has just completed the sculpture for the National Japanese American Memorial, fulfilling two back-to-back monument commissions that began in 1996 with the Leonardo da Vinci horse. "I have never worked as hard in my life or learned as much about life, politics or myself as I have during the last four years. It is one thing to be a sculptor doing your own work on your own time schedule and for your own pleasure. It is another thing to be responsible for an international project that has its conceptual parameters publicly laid out for you by its title, and it is still another when it encompasses the tragedy of your family's experience."

The monument pays homage to the 110,000 men, women and children of Japanese ancestry who were interned, including those who served in the United States Military and the war effort, when widespread hysteria hit this country shortly after the bombing of Pearl Harbor. The piece itself is majestic, standing 14 feet tall. The entire sculpture is bronze, with a textured base simulated to look like natural stone that gradually becomes smoother as your eyes reach the top.

Two cranes are perched astride the column and are bound to it by a tangle of barbed wire.

In their long beaks they grasp the prickly wire and although their outer wings are restricted from any movement, the wings upon which they lean, the ones that have escaped the spiky shackles, rise gloriously above their heads.

The imprisonment of Japanese Americans during World War II affected Nina's family directly. Her own grandfather, a resident of Hawaii for nearly 40 years and a business owner, was interned in one of the camps. "He was seen as a threat by the U.S. government due to his status as a community leader and an owner of a large store." Sadly, he never saw freedom again, perishing in the camp. Her symbolic use of the cranes to represent the struggle of Japanese Americans during this difficult time adds to the emotional pull of the piece. Nina admits that symbolism is often an element in her work. "I use sculpture as a language to explore and reflect my own inner most truth through the use of symbols that make their impressions on me in various ways. The animals I use in my work are often archetypes or bearers of concepts; they are very rarely a purely mimetic image. At times, they have revealed themselves slowly and evolved into icons of

power through a great amount of research and difficulties, such as with the Leonardo da

Vinci horse. At other times, their appearance is more immediate, (through visions and dreams) and mystical in nature, as with the Golden Cranes of the Memorial. These two processes are different in their emphasis, but are similar, as they are triggered by research into some area, or my unconscious rising to a level that intrigues me or gives me some insight into my own being."

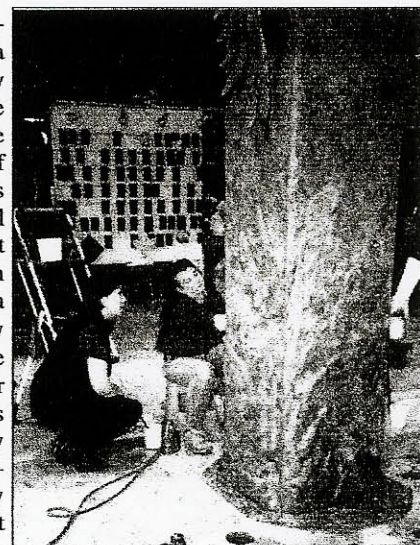
Nina Akamu was born in 1955, the only child of a Chinese-Japanese father and a Japanese mother, both of whom were born in Hawaii and are American citizens. Her father served in the air force and the peripatetic lifestyle opened up the world of travel to Nina as well as the world of art.

"My first influence of sculpture came from the intricately carved and crafted net-suke of Japan that I saw as a child." Showing a lot of artistic promise, Nina eventually went on to a vocational technical high school in Delaware where she spe-

cialized in Commercial Art. From there she entered the Maryland Insti-



Nina Akamu chiseling away at the National Japanese American Memorial



Nina carefully watching the patination of the Memorial